

Baby Boomers and Cops, a Recipe for Success

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The year is 2015. Seventy-six million Baby Boomers are in various stages of retirement and have changed how Americans view old age. Drastically different from the G.I. and Silent Generations (Americans born between 1930 and 1946), Boomers are politically active and socially liberal, and they have completely changed the way local law enforcement services are delivered. The majority of law enforcement calls for service now originate from large-scale senior developments built after voters passed a statewide initiative to transfer funds from Redevelopment Agencies into City-sponsored Senior Communities. These communities, and their politically-savvy senior residents, are responsible for over 90 percent of all police-related calls for service.

Due to the overwhelming number of senior-related calls for police services, municipal police officers seldom provide any proactive, or reactive, enforcement to the remaining areas of most cities, effectively leaving the rest of the citizenry without police protection. Attempts to pass public safety tax measures were easily defeated by the senior majority, who were not interested in paying additional taxes for problems they considered to be outside their “backyard.”

Is the above scenario fact or fiction, optimistic or pessimistic? The answer to that question depends on how local law enforcement can adapt and prepare itself to meet the new challenges, opportunities, and potential risks of policing an aging population.

Historical Perspective

When we think of Baby Boomers (Americans born between 1946 and 1964¹), we are reminded of an era that includes: the opening of Disneyland, the death of Marilyn Monroe, elementary school kids required to practice “duck and cover” during nuclear war drills, Sidney Poitier becoming the first black actor to win an Oscar, and the advent of ZIP codes and the touch-tone phone. But, Boomers are more than a generation of the past; they are a generation that has the ability to significantly affect the future of America and the way police services are delivered.

The Baby Boomer generation has commanded the attention of demographers, marketers, and social scientists for many years. At over seventy-six million strong, Baby Boomers represent the largest growth of the population in the history of the United States.

According to Roper Starch Worldwide, Baby Boomers have been, and will continue to be, watched intently for insight into the future of this country.² This massive generation fully expects that advances in health care and genomics will allow them to live beyond the actuarial expectancy of 82.3 years³. In addition to living beyond 82 years, Boomers are expected to be healthy, active, and independent, and they anticipate being engaged in entertainment and luxury. What sets the Boomers apart from previous generations, besides their massive numbers, is their financial status and access to disposable income.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Roper Starch Worldwide Incorporated research suggests Baby Boomers themselves are aware of the uniqueness of their peer group and certainly will be watched intently for insight into the future of the country⁴. These politically savvy, and influential, seniors will have the ability to influence tax measures and funding priorities based on their sheer numbers; a fact that local municipalities and public safety should not ignore.

Anticipated Law Enforcement Issues

As the senior population continues to grow, so does the problem of elder abuse. Many experts warn that California, and the rest of the nation, is ill-prepared to deal with the increase in abuse cases as the Baby Boomers grow older. Many estimates put the abuse rate at 1 out of every 20 seniors, and some expect this to increase as the state's population ages and grows more vulnerable.⁵ Paul Greenwood, a San Diego Deputy District Attorney, states, "I see the problem magnifying over the next few years. These cases are going on all around us. ...Elders are living longer, and we have so many more thousands of elders living in million-dollar properties."⁶ In addition to physical abuse, law enforcement may see a dramatic increase in a "new wave" of crimes such as real estate fraud, emotional abuse, Internet and phone scams and other forms of financial exploitation. California State Senator Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto (an advocate for seniors) attributes this increase in financial exploitation to "everybody's gotten older, and a lot of folks have gotten asset rich, even if they're cash poor. So they're tempting targets."

Many experts, including prosecutors and social workers, believe it will require a fundamental shift in societal attitudes and a reshuffling of federal, state and local budget priorities before elder abuse gets the steady attention it needs.⁷ Law enforcement must be prepared to deal with these elder-related crimes and the associated pressure from senior groups to force public safety to alter its priorities to address these crimes.

The Expert's View

In March of 2005, a panel of experts convened in Fremont, California, to discuss the issue of law enforcement's ability to provide services to an aging population. One issue the group expected public safety to encounter is the increase in human services-type requests. Some of these requests included: minor medical calls for service, welfare-checks (gravely disabled or unable to care for themselves), vacation checks, psychological evaluations, and increased homeless-related calls for service. The panel expected an internal struggle for funding between the police and human services would further exacerbate law enforcement's ability to provide these types of service requests. There are several examples of innovation ways police agencies have developed programs to address some of these emerging human service requests. One worth further assessment by persons interested in possible solutions is Jackson County's "SALT." The County Sheriff and the AARP implemented SALT – seniors and law enforcement together – as a new "umbrella network" for seniors in their county. This program, coordinates social services, medical care, transportation, and local law enforcement in an attempt to direct seniors back to into a safe environment. According to an article in the

Prime Times, “networking among SALT members, police agencies are responding to fewer calls from seniors who are losing touch with daily realities...”⁸

In addition, the panel surmised that health care, housing, and food costs would continue to rise to a level where many seniors could not afford basic living costs on a fixed income. This would affect the quality of life for many seniors, who would be forced to rely on public assistance and on public safety for some routine living requests (i.e., shelter, food, and basic medical care). According to Roper Starch Worldwide, 23 percent of Baby Boomers think they will have to struggle to make ends meet, and a widening gap between the rich and poor (the “Haves” and the “Haves Not”) is becoming more evident.⁹

The New Senior

An expert in Intergovernmental Relations describes Baby Boomers as the “holders of the wealth” and acknowledged that the political strength of seniors will certainly increase as their numbers continue to grow. These Boomers, who are expected to reach retirement age in massive numbers, have unique expectations for retirement¹⁰.

- Eight out of ten Baby Boomers say they plan to work at least part time during their retirement
- 49 percent say they expect to devote more time to community service or volunteer activities during retirement
- 68 percent say they can count on self-directed sources of income such as IRAs and 401(k)s during retirement

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The Baby Boomer generation is projected to be politically active, work part-time, and have the financial resources to support political efforts.

Trends of the Future

One of the effects of an aging population can be seen in the real estate industry, especially in the age-restricted housing market. As the Baby Boomer generation begins to retire, the demand for senior-related housing is unprecedented. The National Association of Home Builders projected in 2005 that more than 25 percent of the 1.2 million homes built that year would be purchased by someone older than 50.¹¹ This demand for senior-related housing has many home builders interested in serving this market, especially considering the amount of disposable income the Baby Boomers are expected to have. Interestingly enough, these sophisticated and affluent 50-plus Boomers have diverse interests and will demand “lock-it-and-leave-it” convenience in the housing market so that they can take extended trips and not worry about their home.

Sun City Center and Leisure World in Florida (www.suncitycenter.org and www.lwsb.com) and Del Webb’s Sun City in Texas (www.delwebb.com) are examples of the great demand for all-inclusive senior living. These large-scale senior communities offer numerous amenities aimed at satisfying the Boomers’ need for an active retirement life. Some of these amenities include: luxury homes, club houses, community centers, gyms, golf courses, and libraries. Leisure World, which boasts over 7,500 residents and a voter turnout of about 85 to 90 percent, claim politicians pay attention to its residents because “they have to.”¹² Of great interest to law enforcement should be the inclusion of

security services by these senior communities. Sun City Center in Florida describes its security patrol in the following statement on its website:

“The Patrol operates five radio-equipped cars, operating day and night throughout the community. Any suspicious activity is immediately reported to the local Hillsborough County Sheriff. Other services of the Patrol include helping to locate residents reported missing, provide local non-medical emergency transportation, assist with unwanted stray animal, lost animals, auto breakdowns, lost house keys and similar activities. A House Watch registry is maintained so that the Patrol can keep watch over the home of a resident who is known to be away.”

It is fairly clear these politically-savvy Baby Boomers will influence the way America views retirement. From their unprecedented numbers, and their anticipated access to disposal income, to their ability to demand age-restricted housing these “new seniors” are certainly a force to be reckoned with. Of greater concern, however, could be the budget and service demands placed on local law enforcement by Baby Boomers in the not-so-distance future.

Budget and Service Demands

Many California police agencies are finding it necessary to cut back services and personnel in an attempt to address ongoing operating budget deficits. These cut backs can have a negative effect on members of the senior population, who will expect full-service from their police departments, and have the political strength to demand the

increase in service. To compound the issue, many large-scale senior communities are offering full-service security from private security patrols. These private security patrols have the ability to respond to many criminal and quality-of-life service requests that some police departments cannot address simply due to the private patrols' reduced personnel costs (i.e., the cost of a police officer versus that of a security guard).

Police leaders should recognize the importance of perceptions. If seniors perceive inadequate attention from the police to their needs, they may push this “generational divide” between seniors and the rest of the community, resulting in a shift in societal attitude against traditional police deployment priorities. This theory is based on the fact that seniors are willing to pay for private security patrols and other senior-related services to improve their quality of life. The potential for seniors to funnel their money away from public safety to private security patrols is conceivable, based on both a bigger return on their investment and on the ability of private security patrols to meet their needs from a customer service perspective. At this point, city and counties surrounding many of these large-scale adult communities have not been adversely impacted by increased demands for service or loss of public funding; however, as these adult communities continue to grow, the probability for a fiscal impact will also increase. Cities and counties certainly have the ability to require development agreements, impose Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), or increase public safety taxes to fund these new service demands, but political leaders must be aware that competing priorities will struggle for a share of these limited public funds.

In addition to influencing the housing market to meet their needs, it is anticipated that Baby Boomers will expect a high profile of police or similar security presence to keep their community safe. This increase in the demand for service has the potential to push public safety to its breaking point unless strategies to address these issues are developed and implemented in the near future.

Next Steps

The six key tasks identified below are essential to begin the transition from providing traditional police services to the implementation of new policing strategies that can adapt to the changing service demands of an aging population:

- Increase the number, and quality, of advanced officer training courses to include strategies to effectively police an aging population and develop senior sensitivity training
- Develop a “Senior Program” to creatively empower the senior community to become involved in law enforcement through a challenging volunteer program. These senior programs must be more than clerical support or volunteer parking patrols and must entice this talented group in civic involvement. Some examples could include: crime analysis, computer programming, or staffing/work load studies
- Determine the number, and types, of service demands that seniors will expect from their police departments
- Develop a protocol with police and fire in departments with respect to changing or adapting to the demands of public safety from the senior community

- Determine required staffing levels for police officers in an attempt to meet the anticipated increase in calls for senior by the senior population.
- Develop a police-liaison with the AARP and senior community residences in an attempt to promote a positive working relationship and enhanced communication

Conclusion

As the senior population continues to grow, law enforcement must develop, promote, and encourage a positive working relationship with this segment of society. This relationship must be built on trust, communication, and collaborative problem solving. Law enforcement can not expect senior to quietly retire into the sunset, Ken Dychtwald, president of Age Wave, says boomers “don’t want to be on the sidelines” and “want the action.”¹³ These politically savvy seniors have the ability to redirect public safety funds, and other historically safe revenue sources away from cities and counties to more senior-related services. Unless law enforcement consciously works to develop a positive partnership with this potentially influential group, law enforcement’s ability to pass funding measures, or keep funding at current levels, could be at risk. These seniors, affectionally known as the “holders of the wealth”¹⁴, certainly have the political strength to defeat any tax measure they do not support. This generational divide is being seen in communities with large retiree populations who do not have children in the public school system and are voting down any school bond issues.¹⁵

It is fairly obvious that an aging population will have a major impact on law enforcement; the issue will be whether law enforcement can prepare itself, and the rest of the

community, to meet these new challenges by taking advantage of new opportunities and reducing the potential risks.

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- ¹ Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis, 1999 Roper Starch Worldwide Inc and the AARP, Page 1
- ² Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis, 1999 Roper Starch Worldwide Inc and the AARP, Page 1
- ³ Newsweek, The Boomer Files, Hitting 60, November 14, 2005, page 52
- ⁴ Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis, 1999 Roper Starch Worldwide Inc and the AARP
- ⁵ Golden Years Tarnished by Abuse, Jim Doyle, Chronicle Staff Writer, May 31, 2005
- ⁶ Golden Years Tarnished by Abuse, Jim Doyle, Chronicle Staff Writer, May 31, 2005
- ⁷ Golden Years Tarnished by Abuse, Jim Doyle, Chronicle Staff Writer, May 31, 2005
- ⁸ Salt: Police/senior network helps older residents, John Darling, Prime Times The Mail Tribune 2000, page 1
- ⁹ Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis, 1999 Roper Starch Worldwide Inc and the AARP, Page 7
- ¹⁰ Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis, 1999 Roper Starch Worldwide Inc and the AARP, Page 10
- ¹¹ Boomer generation finds age-restricted housing to its liking, Eileen Rivers, ANG Newspapers, November 13, 2005
- ¹² The Washington Times, Seniors Exercise Option by Gabriella Boston, January 9, 2005, page 3
- ¹³ Newsweek, The Boomer Files, Hitting 60, November 14, 2005, page 54
- ¹⁴ Nominal Group Technique Panel convening on March 31, 2005 at the Fremont Police Department. Panel members consisted of:
- Ms. Suzanne Shenfil, Director of Human Services, City of Fremont
 - Mr. Jim Becklenberg, Budget Manager, City of Fremont
 - Ms. Debra Nunn, Neighborhood Crime Watch
 - Ms. Lisa Goldman, Intergovernmental Relations Manager, City of Fremont
 - Ms. Sandra Cortez, Police Captain, City of Fremont
 - Ms. Clarise Lew, Police Personnel Sergeant
 - Ms Geneva Bosques, Red Light Traffic Manager, City of Fremont
 - Mr. Paul McCormick, Detective, City of Fremont
 - Ms. Marilyn Moore, Adult Community Resident
- ¹⁵ Dan Walters: As baby boomers age, generation conflict is more evident, Bee Columnist, May 1, 2005